

B Lent 1

18th Feb 2018

Place: St Mary's

Gen9.8-17. 1 Pet

3.18-22

Mark 1.9-15

Theme: Baptism and the Church

- ◆ Who are we?
- ◆ Why are we here?
- ◆ What unites us?
- ◆ Where are we going?
- ◆ These are vital questions both for us a church and for each of us as individuals. They are questions that are all addressed in Baptism, both for each of us individually and for us as a church.
- ◆ All our readings today relate to Baptism. Baptism is inextricably linked to Lent because Lent began as a period of reflection, amendment of life and self denial for those who were preparing for baptism and admission to communion in the early church.
- ◆ As we begin our journey through Lent together can I encourage you to reflect on your baptism and on how it relates to the questions I began with both for you as an individual and for us as a church here at St Mary's.
- ◆ Who are we? It is through our Baptism that we discover our true identity. As a sign of this we are given our names at Baptism and in pagan times it was common for those who had pagan

given names when they became Christians to change them as a sign of that new identity. When Jesus is Baptised he does not receive a new identity, he already is Jesus the Christ, but that identity is made manifest, God says ‘You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.’

- ◆ As we are baptised into Christ we then share with Christ in this identity. The most true thing about each of us is that we are God’s beloved children, and God delights in us. God’s delight in us is not to do with what we have or have not done. God’s delight in us is for our own sake. We are his beloved and he is committed to us, he makes an enduring covenant with us through our baptism.
- ◆ Our Christian identity not only tells us who we are individually, it also tells us where we belong. We are baptised into the Body of Christ. We belong to Christ and to one another. We are fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- ◆ The church is the place where we both explore what that means and learn to live it out together. That is what we at St Mary’s are called to be. That is why we are here and what unites us.
- ◆ When I was an undergraduate one of my friends became a Christian and he was baptised in the Thames in Oxford. It was a very powerful occasion. Friends and members of the church stood on a bridge over the Thames and watched as our vicar, a couple of assistants and Nigel

stood together waist deep in the flowing water. Three times Nigel was lowered backwards under the water and then brought him back up again. It really did look as though he was drowned when he went down and each time it was a wonderful relief when he came back up above the water again.

- ◆ It was a very powerful reminder that in our Baptism we share in Christ's death and resurrection.
- ◆ I said earlier that God loves us and delights in us, but God does not always delight in what we do to one another, to ourselves or to God. Human beings can be hateful. We can be hateful. We all do things that we are sorry for and ashamed of. More than that we are born into a world that corrupts the innocent, exploits the weak and tends towards death and destruction. We are born into a broken world and we both suffer as a result of it and contribute in our own way to its suffering. We cannot help ourselves, any more than the daughter of a slave owner or the son of a slave can help being born into a destructive and abusive relationship. The whole of creation shares in this corruption; this beautiful world is fundamentally broken. That is what we mean by sin.
- ◆ Baptism both points us back to Christ's baptism, to God responding to the state we are in by coming and immersing himself in it in his Son.

Baptism also points us forward to Easter and the resurrection. Christ's baptism is a symbol of his sharing in our dying, which he will do on the cross, and of the power of the resurrection that we mark the beginning of the re-making of creation. Christ is the first fruits of the new heaven and the new earth that God is bringing into being, he is the first stages of the fulfilling of God's work of salvation and we in the church are the continuation of that work. That is who we are and what we are called to be.

- ◆ So let us prepare for Easter by reflecting on our Baptism, on who we are and what unites us and let us ask God's Holy Spirit to show us where God is calling us as a church and individually to share in his great work of salvation.